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Good Oral Health

A healthy smile tells the world all about us — how we feel, how we look, how we care for ourselves, and how healthy we are. A person who has bad breath and missing or decayed teeth, often associated with poor oral health, may feel ashamed and lack the confidence to excel at work or at school. Imagine not being able to chew your food or being in constant pain and not being able to concentrate on work or school. Poor oral health can negatively impact not only our physical health but also our social and emotional well-being. People who smoke, have diabetes, are pregnant or are HIV positive are at increased risk for periodontal disease. To achieve a healthy mouth and healthy life, everyone should establish a dental home and follow the following advice.

Practice good oral hygiene:

Bacterial plaque on teeth causes cavities, gingivitis and periodontal disease. Good oral hygiene will reduce a person's chances of tooth problems. Recent studies have suggested an association with poor oral hygiene and other conditions such as coronary heart disease, premature and low birth weight babies, stroke, chest infections, diabetes, and even some cancers. In addition, people who have oral cancer or have had radiation treatment to the head or neck may be at increased risk for oral health problems. Many medications may cause dry mouth, which can increase the chance of tooth decay. The use of bisphosphonate medications in women for osteoporosis has been linked with "osteonecrosis of the jaw" which means dead bone. In order to reduce the risk associated with any of these conditions or just to improve oral health, everyone should be encouraged to brush their teeth at least twice a day using a fluoride-containing toothpaste and floss. People should replace their toothbrushes every three to four months or more often if bristles are frayed, bent or torn.

Get regular checkups:

Parents are encouraged to take their children for their first dental visit by age one or within six months of the appearance of the first teeth. Adults should see a dentist every six months for an examination and cleaning. This will help prevent problems and stop small problems from getting worse. Individuals who are pregnant or who have periodontal disease, diabetes, HIV infection, or some other health conditions may need to see a dentist more frequently. People who will have radiation treatment to the head or neck area should to see a dentist prior to any treatment. It is important to have the mouth as healthy as possible prior to the start of any radiation therapy to the head or neck.

Follow healthy lifestyle practices:

Most healthy lifestyle practices have positive oral health benefits. These include eating a balanced healthy diet, avoiding excessive sugar, candy, etc. and avoiding tobacco products. In

addition, if people who participate in any recreational activities that might pose a risk of injury to the mouth are recommended to use a mouth guard. Preventing a tooth injury or other mouth injury is much less expensive than the cost to repair such an injury.

By following these simple steps and encouraging others to do so, as well, will significantly increase the chances of having a lifetime of good oral health and healthy teeth. A dentist can provide information on good oral health practices, or you may contact the American Dental Association at: <http://www.ada.org>.

